

Wives of Archibald and Jesse

There is little we can do to write precisely about the wives of Archibald Flanagan and Jesse Smith. It is fortunate, especially in the case of Jesse, that we have an article he wrote for a local newspaper recounting much of his life and we have the last will and testament of Archibald. Their wives did not leave as much of a trail of stories however, so we are left with more generalities than precise anecdotes.

Without a doubt life, was improved for the wives by the time they married and had children compared with their parents and earlier kinfolks. Even at that, life was hard and having children at the rate they did certainly took its toll on them. Medical practices and facilities were scarce and prenatal care in the way it is practiced today was unheard of.

Jesse was a successful business man and probably did all he could to provide help for his wives in looking after the children and keeping them fed. He was married three times and fathered 21 children. His first wife was Absley Joyner. Together they had eight children in their 15 years of married life. She died in 1860 at age 37. His second wife was Nannie Cobb who he married some two years after Absley's death. They had six children. We are not sure how old she was when she married or died. The third wife was Martha Pippin. Jesse married her about 1872 so we can surmise Nannie and Jesse were married about 10 years. Martha and Jesse were married some 13 years before his death at age 72. They had six children. Note that the above numbers do not add up to 21 but that means we are missing one child in the count because it is reliably reported the total number was 21 – quite prolific!

Archibald who was about 12 years younger than Jesse was only married once and he and his wife had 10 children. His wife was Mary Bell who was three years younger than he and lived to be 69 years old. Archibald died at age 62. They had been married some 34 years at his death. Their last child was born about 20 years prior to that. Archibald and Jesse died within two years of each other. From reading his will, it is evident Archibald took great pains to provide for his wife. Their house was a handsome home place and is described elsewhere in these documents.

Much of the food for families during these years was grown in their gardens and canned or otherwise kept safe for later use. Pork was salted so it would last during hot weather and chickens provided meat in a sizable unit. With large families, however, you could visualize a scarcity of leftovers. Cows provided milk, cheese, and the like, more so than meat because of the size of the animal. If a beef was killed, it was customary to “divide with the neighbors” so the meat could be used before it spoiled. Of course, the next time it might be the neighbor who provided the beef. Even at that, spoiled or partly spoiled food was a definite hazard, especially for children, in hot weather with no refrigeration.

Another major source of food stuffs was the corn and other grains grown on the farm. This was the same corn and grain fed to the livestock. Fruit was seasonal but some of the